



October 2023

PALESTINE/ISRAEL CONFLICT

Dear Senator Penny Wong, Foreign Minister:

I wrote on 11 July 2023 to the Prime Minister to express appreciation for the new government's change in policy towards Palestine and the rights of Palestinians.

We are now alarmed by the escalation of the crisis, the harm being done to those directly involved (including the hostages), and the tragic blow it has dealt to the hopes of Israelis and Palestinians. We seek a global focus on a cease fire and working for a durable and peaceful outcome for all concerned.

We thank you and the Australian Government for your affirmation of the importance of assisting civilians caught up in the fighting, and for the financial and practical support offered to the Red Cross and UN agencies. We trust that you will maintain the assistance and continue to press for an effective humanitarian corridor into Gaza. We also appreciate your own comments on the importance of avoiding anti-Semitic or Islamophobic comments about the conflict.

Given the very dangerous implications of the conflict for the whole Middle East region, we urge the Australian Government to work for an international effort to call for a cease fire, and to develop a plan for the negotiation of effective long-term measures for peace. We believe the United Nations, despite the restraints on its role, can play a vital part in such moves, convening meetings with all the parties and using its diplomatic resources to mediate.

People from the different religious groups linked with the Middle East have a contribution to make, in view of the commitment of all major faiths to human dignity and peace. We note, for example, that the churches of the Middle East are appealing for the immediate cessation of the deadly violence, and that the World Council of Churches has called for respect for international law and human rights.

As Quakers we continue a creative role of enabling dialogue among diplomats and public officials through our permanent presence as accredited NGOs at the United Nations in New York and Geneva. The Quaker United Nations Office issued a public statement on 17 October calling for national leaders, faith leaders, and journalists to use their power to end war crimes and ensure accountability.

We join in prayers for peace and justice. We ask the Australian Government to continue its efforts to press for an immediate ceasefire, the delivery of humanitarian aid and negotiations leading to a durable peace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Bruce Henry
Presiding Clerk
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia